

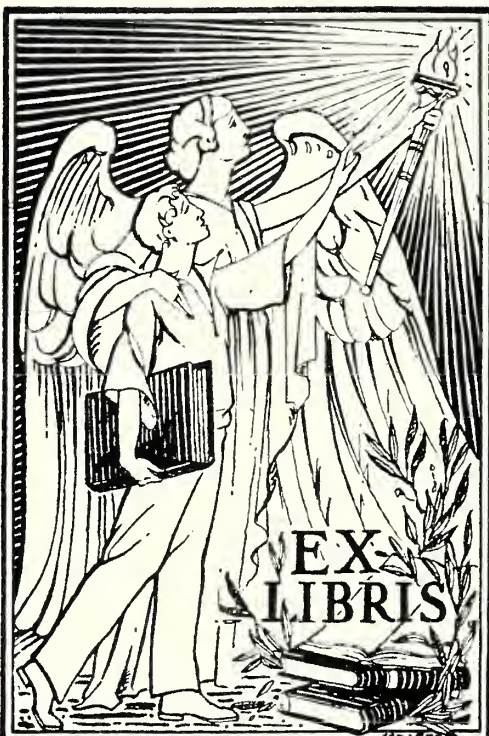
CHANGING SERVICES TO THE BLIND

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For Your Values? (Ed.)

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CHANGING SERVICES TO THE BLIND

By SISTER M. ROSE IMELDA, C.S.J., M.A.

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THE first form of education for the blind in the world was an institute opened in Paris in 1784 by Valentin Haüy. In 1832, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia opened residential schools for them. The first school wholly supported by the state was opened in Ohio in 1837. (1) In 1952 it was reported that there were 61 schools for the blind, most of which were state-supported. Eleven states had resource rooms in public schools and there Braille classes had special teachers to assist the blind pupils, with most of the work done in the regular classroom. In 1952 there was only one school in the United States for the mentally retarded blind child—the Royer Greves, at Paoli, Pennsylvania. (2)

In Europe, in 1957, an important discussion took place at the International Conference of Educators of Blind Youth. It was estimated that only 6 per cent of the total number of blind children in the world receive an education. There are believed to be 660,000 blind children in the world, with 500,000 living in rural areas. Only 40,000 are receiving an education. Therefore, a blind child has only one-eighth of a chance to receive an education, compared with seeing children. (3) Although great strides have been made in the education of the blind on our national scene, the number of blind children who do not receive special services set up by the state and federal government or other agencies may equal the number of children who do. Some blind children have been placed in mental institutions or in centers for retarded children, often

without proper evaluation of their abilities. (4)

New Trends and How They Affect Blind Children

Dunn notes four major changes which are seriously affecting the education of the blind:

1. The wave of children with retrolental fibroplasia has already begun to move through the schools.

2. The prevalence of multiple disability among blind children has increased and is likely to do so in an exponential function.

3. Low optical aids have sharply reduced the number of legally blind children who depend upon the use of Braille at school.

4. The day-school movement has reached a zenith in a short period, and must modify its purpose and procedures if it is to continue providing a valuable service to the field. (5)

Dunn predicts that because of the prevention of retrolental fibroplasia the relative prevalence of blindness among school-aged children will decrease by 50 to 75 per cent in the next 10 to 15 years. There will be a different type of child needing services. With the increased ability of physicians to save many more congenital cases, the challenge of multiple disability is likely to increase rapidly. Dunn also ventures to predict that by 1970 at least one-third of the total number of blind children will have multiple disabilities.

Low optical aids have been the most startling development in this field in the 1960's. In one study of



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1,000 visually limited children, all of whom fell within the legal definition of blindness, only five were not learning to read by ink print following low optical-aid help.

Regarding public day schools, U. S. Office of Education statistics show that only 529 blind children were in these schools in 1948. In 1958, the number was reported at 2,739. The American Printing House for the Blind in its 1962 Report states that nearly 60 per cent of blind pupils are now being educated in public or integrated school situations. (6)

In the past there have been heated debates about the relative merits of the residential school and the integrated program in a regular day school. It is more generally recognized now that there is a definite need for both types, as well as the resource room program. In all programs there is a greater need for orientation and mobility skills, for "efficient living skills" in such areas as personal appearance, manners, personality, conversation, good taste, etc. (7) Physical fitness programs will find stronger emphasis in a residential school curriculum and in the counseling kit of the itinerant teacher. All programs will have to examine the urgent and real needs of the sometimes-called "children nobody knows what to do with" or the children with "no place to go."

At the 43rd biennial convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind in Columbus, Ohio, in 1956, Dr. Leon Charney quoted reliable estimates to show that not more than one in four of exceptional children of all types is receiving the special education services which he requires. Dr. Charney refers to a survey made of 1956 facilities or programs in certain states. Conclusions were:

1. The educational services

needed by these children are not being met.

2. What initiative has been displayed, has largely come from residential schools.

3. It is likely that the blind mentally retarded will become a major responsibility of residential schools because of the small number of children and the need for highly specialized personnel.

4. Whatever services do exist, are restricted to high educables. (8)

An Ideal Program

The writer would like to mention a particular program in which she is involved and in which the newer trends have been noted; through it a great variety of previously unmet needs are now being fulfilled. Following an evaluation by a professional team consisting of psychiatrist, psychologist, medical doctor, speech and hearing specialists, school principal, teacher and house-mother, together with the program coordinator, each child has been placed where he can obtain his maximum potential and grow as a happy, useful citizen. The writer refers to the Special Education Program for Blind Children under the auspices of Saint Joseph's School for the Blind, Jersey City, N. J., and the Mount Carmel Guild Special Education Department for the Blind, Newark, N. J. In 1960 Saint Joseph's School for the Blind combined its resources with those of the Mount Carmel Guild. In this way a more complete range of services are now being offered to the blind children in the area as well as from other states and countries. At present an unmatched range of programs are available to blind children. This unique arrangement has made it possible for them to receive an education suited to their special needs.

Under the itinerant-teacher pro-



gram, the blind child is able to live at home, attend the local Catholic school, together with his sighted brothers and sisters. His books are identical to those which are used by his sighted classmates, except they are prepared in Braille, or in recorded form. He learns the ordinary subjects from the regular classroom teacher and submits his written assignments in typed form. A specially trained Sister travels from one school to another where there are blind students to teach them Braille skills, typing, and other subjects which are required. She counsels the parents and the regular classroom teacher with regard to educational matters.

Under the resource-room program the blind child attends a centrally located parish school with sighted children. He may live at home, or board at Saint Joseph's School for the Blind. In either case, he is a member of a regular sighted class and participates in all regular class activities.

Many blind children, because of a special home problem, lack of local school facilities, the recency of onset of blindness, or some other condition, do not attend class with sighted children. The Specialized School furnishes blind children round-the-clock education which offers many special advantages. Dedicated housemothers attempt to create a home-like environment for the young students. In addition to regular classwork and Braille instruction, Saint Joseph's School for the Blind offers swimming instructions, radio classes, music and dancing lessons, physical therapy, and mobility training.

Some blind children, and their number is increasing, in addition to blindness, possess a second and perhaps a third handicap—retardation and/or emotional disturbance. Such children require expert

psychological and educational services. The Sisters of Saint Joseph have received specialized training in order to be able to offer maximum educational benefits to children with multiple handicaps. In addition a psychologist is in attendance at the school two days each week for psychological testing, psychological therapy, and counseling. Special provisions are made for trainable blind children. This program enables these children to become more independent and better able to care for themselves.

Parents of blind children are invited to take part in Parent Education discussion groups each year. They may also participate in counseling and therapy sessions with skilled psychologists when this is desired.

Many of the improvements noted in the more optimistic reports given by skilled psychologists and educators throughout the nation in regard to short-term projects with severely multiply handicapped children, we see happening on a daily basis all year long among our 40 multiply handicapped children. They offer a tremendous challenge to the "brave of heart."

Need for Professional Personnel

The multi-disciplinary treatment team serving these multiply handicapped blind children must of necessity be of the highest caliber. The retarded blind child has needs which take on a new dimension, the answer to which is hardly to be found in books. These needs can be met in the therapeutic relationship existing between the child and the entire team.

In dealing with children's multiple disabilities, teachers require a background of education in the field of mental retardation, brain damage, speech, hearing, and orthopedic problems, together with a



knowledge of the psychology of the exceptional child. These teachers need a much greater skill in educational diagnosis. They should not only be able to measure scholastic aptitude and achievement, but also should have preparation in evaluating interests, special aptitudes, etc. These new-type teachers of the visually handicapped must possess greater research skills than in the past and can benefit by courses in statistics and research design. They should actually carry out a study under the direction of a major advisor. (9)

Not all psychiatrists or psychologists know how to deal with the multiply handicapped child. It is a new field of endeavor; the trend, statistics-wise, is surely heading in the direction of greater need for insight in this area as the number of multiply handicapped blind children on the educational scene doubles and triples. Their case is certainly not irreversible in all instances nor even in many instances. If the child is not responding, the team needs to look at its own inabilities as well as at the child's failures.

The most encouraging project in the nation so far in this field was one carried on at the Michigan School for the Blind under the expert guidance of Dr. Anna Elonen. The conclusion of the study team was that in the specific 28 cases an early diagnostic service similar to the one then used, could have prevented serious maladjustment and developmental and educational retardation had it been available to the parents and children before the marked problems now in evidence. (10) This is an "awe-ful" thing to say, and should make educators throughout the nation face themselves more squarely and spend themselves in meeting the challenges of the times.

It will be the ordinary procedure for the teachers of the future to have one or two normal blind children in the school system—if the trends continue as they are now. This is as it should be, for blind children want this in a most urgent way. They have proven that they can cope with the regular curriculum and measure up socially and physically with their sighted peers. If educators accept the principle that blind children are first of all children, and that their greatest need is to compete as early as possible with the sighted world they must live in as adults, then they will, as a matter of necessity and course, prepare for this in their professional training. All teacher-training curricula have speech courses as part of the whole because the presence of this need is recognized. It would seem that Braille and psychology courses on the handicapped could be added to teacher-training curricula in all colleges, if we envision the future total integration of normal and gifted blind children in the regular classroom. This would make way and open doors in many schools for the blind, for thousands of blind children who at present have no educational program.

The most encouraging piece of literature yet to be compiled on this subject is a recent report by Gruber and Moor offering practical answers to a multi-faceted problem. (11) No one can read this book without admitting that it provides an accurate and sensitive guide for this highly specialized work.

Conclusion

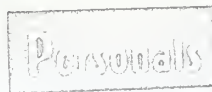
The important changes foreseen in trends in educating blind children are that many more of these children of average and above average ability will be seeking admission into the regular public or parochial schools throughout the



nation. Many multiply handicapped children will require expert handling in a highly specialized center, if we are to meet the present and future needs of our times. More children previously utilizing Braille will be using print in the regular classroom. Teacher-training, special education and housemother programs must of necessity take a forward look at these needs and adjust their curricula to meet them.

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Msgr. John J. McClafferty, assistant to the rector for university development at the Catholic University of America, has been named pastor of the Church of St. Peter, Staten Island, N. Y. Msgr. McClafferty is a former dean of the School of Social Work at C. U. and came to Washington, D. C. from the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York where he was director of the Division of Social Research.

Miss Mary F. Godley, who had been a member of the staff of the Catholic Home Bureau, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, until her retirement in 1959, died at the Mary Manning Walsh Home in New York City on February 7. Miss Godley was a graduate of Barnard College and Fordham University School of Social Service. She joined the staff of the New York Catholic Charities in 1920 as Assistant Director of the Department of Child Care, and in 1925 became Executive Secretary of the Catholic Home Bureau. She was a member of the first faculty of the School of Social Work at the Catholic University in Washington.

Miss Irene Weber, Casework Director of Catholic Children's Services, Archdiocese of Seattle, is one of six lay persons in the Archdiocese of Seattle named to receive the papal medal, *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, by His Holiness Pope John XXIII. Miss Weber is one of the three original caseworkers who joined the staff of Catholic Children's Services when it was established 25 years ago. A graduate of the University of Washing-

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Changing services to the blind.

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